

[Mr. Schaeffer]

Beliefs and customs - Folkstuff Copy - 2

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Saul Levitt

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace, New York City

DATE Sept 28, 1938

SUBJECT LOCAL LIFE AND INDUSTRY RIVER AND CREEK SHORES OF NEW YORK CITY — Mr. Schaeffer

1. Date and time of interview September 27 and 28, 1938
2. Place of Interview EASTCHESTER BAY, (On Long Island Sound, vicinity Polham Bay Park.
3. Name and address of informant Schaefer, Eastchester Bay, and Nelson
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

X

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5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

X

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

Eastchester Bay, at that point where it touches the gravel bank of the roadbed of the New York New Haven & Hartford Railroad is a shallow inlet of Long Island Sound. With its several score of small boats, and several boathouses it is a boating and fishing center on a small scale, a kind of third cousin to the neighboring City Island boating center and other more thriving shore spots along the Sound. Its small flotilla of boats anchored now for the winter near the City Island Bridge are small craft, some cabin cruisers up to 30 feet, "kickers," small open boats of different kinds. Hanging onto the shores on both sides of the gravel roadbed which is apparently a causeway are narrow pierways, boathouses which are no more than shacks; and a few hundred feet in from the boathouses, on the north side of the railroad are perhaps half a dozen small frame houses. The leaning shack-boathouses poised on stilts in the bay, the narrow pierways, the bridge are in need of coloring; they are gray and water-hued.

The brightest thing in sight is the white and green painted little bandbox of a house with the shield on the door marked Baychester Marine Club and the knocker below the shield which is a gold-gilt anchor. With the summer crowd gone, only a few of the boathouses remain open occupied with boat-repair jobs and occasional boat-rentals for the autumn fishing enthusiast. A small colony remains, a few people who live on a barge, a house on stilts, a lookout attic on top of a boat-house, remaining behind after the wash of the summer season like shell-fish and clams on a sandbar with the tide out. The place 'holes in' for the winter, figuratively sits around the stove waiting for Spring. It is essentially a summer community and what is left after the summer is over is a small a community vaguely engaged "around boats" — beachcombers, odd-job men; boat-mechanics. This little community is reached by striking off the main highway to City Island along a path

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through fields of tall grass or through other paths which run through a patch of woodland off the shore road to New Rochelle. Approaching it along these paths, the 'colony' seems to lie very low, almost camouflaged under an expansive of flat country and the wide-spreading Sound; and people finally are seen by the naked eye in much the same way that the eye finds live things when it looks for a long time down among the tall grasses — men who are weatherbeaten and quiet, a woman in gingham, a long-legged girl. All motions are subdued and expressions in faces are the opposite of dramatic. At high tide the waving tall grass is caught up to its waist by the water, which rises about twelve inches above the footpath along the railroad; at low tide, on the flats and sandbars which emerge are skeletons of boats decomposed, dying, on a watery plain, like the ox and buffalo skulls we used to read about lying on the Great Plains. As a matter of fact it might be said of the whole place that the ribs show.

The barge on which informant, (Schaefer), lives looks down at the heels from the outside; it was apparently a coal barge but that was a very long time ago. From the few details informant was willing to furnish the barge was towed to the shore along the railroad and scuttled there. It provides a roomy but not well-kept house, with a kitchen, a living room and bedroom. These quarters take up one end of the boat. In the center a very large dark interior, are kept many gadgets, tools, boat parts, all of them looking old. The kitchen and living room are neatly but poorly furnished. There is no electricity and no radio. A ladder runs from the ground to the dock. On the dock are clotheslines. At high tide the approach to the barge is a foot under water.

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NEW YORK

FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE NEW YORK

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NAME OF WORKER SAUL LEVITT

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace, New York City

DATE Sept. 27, 28, 1938

SUBJECT LOCAL LIFE AND INDUSTRY: THE RIVER AND CREEK SHORES OF NEW YORK CITY

1. Ancestry (GERMAN)

2. Place and date of birth

East Bronx, 1897

3. Family Wife, one son aged 11

4. Places lived in, with dates EAST BRONX, and now for seven years at Eastchester Bay.

5. Education, with dates Elementary school, one year high school, learned plumbing trade.

6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates Plumber by trade until he moved to Eastchester Bay; now owns small sailboat which is rented out during the summer and indicated that he does odd jobs around neighboring boathouses and an occasional plumbing job.

7. Special skills and interests Is interested mainly in activity around shore. Would like to own a small boathouse and build boats. Has learned, since he came to live here, how to operate sail and motor boats and has a pilot's [?] knowledge of Long Island Sound.

8. Community and religious activities

No particular activity

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9. Description of informant Informant is short, with reddish-brown hair and discolored teeth; he was suspicious of interviewer in a manner which was a mixture of curiosity and an over-wariness as if to say nobody is going to put anything over on me. Throughout interview informant gave impression of naivete and cynicism. He was anxious to indicate superiority over other residents of colony. They were provincial, backward, unprogressive, etc — this was general tenor of attitude. Also he was very concerned over giving interview because he felt that his own story might be worth money. He is quite poor but his continual naive harping and picking up of all questions asked him for possible personal gain was somewhat nauseating. He had written an account of an expedition

10. Other Points gained in interview 2 in a lifeboat from the Bronx to Long Branch which he showed interviewer after exacting promise that none of it would be reprinted or made use of in anyway as "I expect to sell this to some magazine or publisher. He was continually attempting to make interview turn the other way so as to make some connection with publisher for manuscripts. The story is not well done but it has some amazing touches. It was a most quixotic exploit, done in 1932 when informant was dead broke; he studied maps of the East River down to the Bay and also of the Jersey shore to Long Branch —aifty mile trip each way. It was done in a lifeboat with a companion; using two pairs of oars. This is a complete adventure in its own right which interviewer will attempt to get right to quote at length rom on next interview. Informant, after initial air of wariness became very glib. He poured beer for interviewer. He was evidently lonely because of inability to get along with older and more 'native' elements of colony.

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NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

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NAME OF WORKER Saul Levitt

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace, New York City

DATE Sept 27-28, 1938

SUBJECT LOCAL LIFE AND INDUSTRY: (THE RIVER AND CREEK SHORES OF NEW YORK CITY

I can't live in an apartment no more. I get cramped when I visit anybody in the City the steam heat gets me. Look at the way you're dressed and me I go around in pants and undershirt until late October. I don' wanna tell you anything I've gotta story, I've got a lot of stories but I wanna get something for 'em. You know what I mean, it's your job to get stories but I wanna get something for 'em. You don't think they'd pay something for a story I got one about a trip yeah. That's a story but I wouldn't give it away for nothing. (At this point informant began rummagling rummaging through books on shelves in kitchen and living room. Titles were of technical books on engineering, heating etc. Found manuscripts of trip to Long Branch which describes a difficult trip through the treacherous currents and sometimes against the tides to Long Branch, New Jersey). Yeah, I learned all about navigation that time. You got a lot of traffic on the river. Maybe I'll let you take a little bit out of that story so maybe It'll get advertised. Isn't that possible? It's funny bit it's human nature you'd never think a man could get 2 used to it. There's good and bad features in a depression if there was no depression I'd never be out here. I know this Sound — no, ain't anything I ever heard that's interesting around here. The people here don't like me and I keep my mouth shut. I don't mix with them. I'm an anti-Nazi even if I'm German by background but I wanna tell you about Nelson, (referring to boathouse owner farther down the shore), no, I don't mean the old man but his son he's a fascist. Am I sure? Well, I don' mean he's a fascist but he thinks that way but he ain't a real one. Yeah, he just got theose those ideas in his mind that's what I mean. What do we do here in the winter? I get a job once in a while. In the winter you just goet got snow but you'd be surprised what you can

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get used to I'd never thought eight years ago I could live out here. I can't fish, isn't that funny, I'm not superstitious. I guess the fish don't like my line. I once had two butterfish going around my hook I clocked them thirteen minutes by the clock. Now you and Jack and Jill can set your lines in the water on the other hand and I can take those lines and the fish'll bite. No, I'm not superstitious but that's the way it works, they don't bite at my lines. All my good-time charley friends don't see me anymore but I can get along without the them . You got people who say they ain't afraid of the Sound but they don't got out at night. Now I know this Sound. I can find my way around in the dark without lights but I'd like to see some of them try it. Does it get rough on the Sound? I've seen nine foot whitecaps on the Sound. Yeah, it's getting high now, sometimes it covers up that grass. We get freak tides. Yeah, once only since I've been here. It came right up to the deck. How did I get to this barge? It was 3 moved here, then it was scuttled. I can't tell you how because that's in my story. My wife never had nothing to do with water either but it's accumulatin'. She couldn't live in an apartment no more. My boy? He was sickly in the City but he's all-right here. (Referring to neighbor on the other side of railroad trestle, living in a house on stilts on sandbar): he's a Southerner, he aint modern that feller Coward, that's a Tobacco Road family. Did I ever see Tobacco Road? No, but I know what it is. If I had the money I'd see the show.

(At this point interview terminated with promise of other interviews; interviewer discovered that high tide had risen so that it was necessary to take off shoes and stockings and wade across to railroad embankment). Informant called over:

If you know anybody that want's to go sailing some afternoon bring 'em out here I got a sailboat right near the bridge sixteen feet. I named her Rover II after my lifeboat.